

“Water Quality Management 101 – Communicating the Big Picture with the Basics”

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Biographical Sketch of Author

Mr. Smithee is Chief of the Water Quality Programs Division for the Oklahoma Water Resources Board. In that capacity he is responsible for the promulgation of Oklahoma's Water Quality Standards and Standards Implementation rules, all lake's work including diagnostic and feasibility studies and restorations, and much of Oklahoma's surface and groundwater monitoring programs. He has served on numerous state and federal workgroups, including currently serving on the National USDA/EPA Nutrient Criteria Advisory Committee, Bacteria/Recreation Workgroup, and others. He was instrumental in the development of numerous state and federal regulations including the WQS Implementation Rules, Antidegradation requirements, numerical aquatic life criteria and human health criteria, and Use Support Assessment Protocols. He also serves on Oklahoma's Water Quality Monitoring Council, 303(d)/305(b) workgroup, the ODEQ's Water Rules Committee, the ODA's CAFO Rules Committee, as well as chairing the WQS Implementation Advisory Committee.

Abstract

To the lay person, Oklahoma's Water Quality Management Programs (WQMP) often appear disjointed, confused and totally un-coordinated. While in some instances this IS true, it is more often an artifact of failing to properly educate and communicate what we do as water quality professionals. This lack of communication stems from three basic causes. First, we tend to focus too much on the “how” and not the “why” (ie: facts vs. results). Second, we fail to simplify projects, programs and outcomes in a way that makes them easily consumable. Lastly, we too often forget that perception and politics sometimes is more important than truth.

This talk will review Oklahoma's holistic WQMP. This includes how and why we monitor, reports generated, permit activities and enforcement. In order to communicate this somewhat convoluted process, it uses as an analogy how the human body stays healthy. It compares such things as ambient monitoring to an annual physical, NPDES permitting to daily exercise and eating right, etc. It also provides examples of the various reports and lists generated within Oklahoma state government and how these reports drive water quality decision-making. Lastly, it reviews the public communication process of one of Oklahoma's more high profile programs, the Water Quality Standards. This includes how staff navigate both the formal and informal public participation process, utilize optional and required public meetings and hearings, and how they all interact to facilitate the WQS final adoption.